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11 March 2015

Julie Finch
Headteacher
KICKSTART
Telford College of Arts and Technology
Haybridge Road
Telford
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Dear Ms Finch

Special measures monitoring inspection of KICKSTART

Following my visit to your school on 10 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - fully implementing a system that identifies gaps in students' skills, knowledge and understanding in all academic subjects taught
 - using the information gained to develop tailored learning plans for each individual to build on their strengths and fill in gaps in learning alongside, or as part of, their academic courses
 - making clear to students what they should do to improve their work and achievement, through helpful verbal and written feedback
 - regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and taking effective action to bring about improvement where weaknesses are identified.

- Improve students' achievement and increase their rate of progress by:
 - improving their attendance
 - establishing higher expectations of what students can achieve
 - providing courses and subjects that interest students and challenge them at a demanding level
 - considering each student's needs and ensuring that they have an effective balance of academic and vocational subjects to study, at the right level for their varying abilities
 - ensuring that students have enough taught time to complete academic courses.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring safeguarding arrangements fully meet statutory requirements
 - re-establishing systems to check on and support the quality of teaching, teachers' work, and students' outcomes
 - ensuring that money received through the pupil premium is used to support those individuals eligible, and check regularly that it has an impact on their achievement
 - ensuring that the incoming teacher-in-charge has the appropriate resources, training and personnel to lead, manage and improve Kickstart effectively
 - increasing the monitoring role of the management committee, and regularly using the expertise of its members to support school improvement
 - working to provide suitable alternative provision and vocational opportunities that suit students' varying aptitudes and abilities.

- Gain clarity from the local authority about the inclusion of New Directions students on Kickstart's roll, in order to ensure that Kickstart's responsibilities are fully explained and met.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 March 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, I observed students' learning in English, mathematics, art and computing across all four teaching groups. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Management Committee and other members of the committee. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. Informal discussions were held with students and staff. I took account of the eight responses to the staff questionnaire. There were too few responses on Parent View for these to be considered. Students' behaviour was observed as they arrived at the school and at break and lunchtimes. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's monitoring records of the quality of teaching undertaken by school leaders, the headteacher's report to the management committee and the minutes of its meetings. Additional documentation was scrutinised, including information about students' attainment, attendance and the vetting checks on staff new to the school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2014, one teacher has left the school. A new Chair of the Management Committee has been appointed. There have been no other significant changes.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information provided by the school, work in students' books and observations of students' learning show that the quality of teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection visit. As a result, an increasing number of students are producing work that is appropriate to their ability. The school uses a commercial system to measure students' knowledge and understanding when they enter the school and to estimate potential grades in English and mathematics. However, leaders do not routinely use the information from these tests and students' work to measure students' progress. As a consequence, the school does not have an accurate and current view of the progress students are making towards their estimated final grades for GCSE examinations and functional skills tests.

The attainment of students who attend regularly is noticeably higher than that of students who frequently miss school. Many students have low levels of literacy, and this continues to hinder their learning across the curriculum. In collaboration with the local authority, leaders have introduced a whole-school approach to developing students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. However, it is too early to see if the improvements in students' literacy skills seen during this inspection can be sustained.

The majority of students have improved their arithmetical skills. As a result, they are able to apply their knowledge and understanding with increasing fluency. However, more-able students are not given sufficient opportunities to do more complex work. As a consequence, they are not developing the ability to reason mathematically or to solve problems.

The quality of teaching

Teachers and teaching assistants have had training and support to improve their teaching and behaviour management skills. All staff completing the staff questionnaire agreed that they have appropriate opportunities to improve their teaching and that school leaders are doing all they can to improve students' learning. The work in students' books and files shows that teachers' expectations of what students should know, understand and do have begun to rise. As a result, students who attend school regularly demonstrate increased understanding, particularly in mathematics, and a desire to present work that is neat, accurate and complete.

Students' behaviour deteriorates during lesson changeovers. However, teachers are skilled at 'engaging' students in their work, de-escalating potential conflicts and ensuring students focus on their learning throughout the remainder of the lesson. Support staff and the inclusion mentor also provide effective help in and out of classrooms where necessary.

The majority of teachers plan their lessons to ensure students who have been absent from school can catch up with their work. However, teachers' planning is not always informed by what they know about students' capabilities. As a result, more-able students do not have sufficient opportunities to access more difficult work.

Teachers do not use the school's assessment policy consistently. As a result, marking is not always helpful. Where feedback is effective, students use the information and guidance to improve their work. Weaker marking is superficial. Mistakes are not identified and incomplete work is not challenged.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Information provided by the school shows that behaviour is improving. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been reduced. The number of days when students have been absent from school due to exclusion has halved compared to last term. Physical intervention or restraint has not been used this academic year. Students' behaviour in lessons is generally calm. However, some students behave inappropriately during lesson changeovers and take time to settle to their work. A majority of staff who completed the staff questionnaire feel that behaviour is not always well managed as staff do not consistently apply the school's behaviour policy.

Students' attendance, while improving, remains very low. A majority of students have a variety of complex needs and medical conditions. The school works effectively with a range of agencies such as 'Children At risk Through Exploitation' (CATE) to ensure students whose attendance is low are safe from potential harm. The school has reduced the number of students who are on part-time modified timetables but the number remains too high. The local authority has increased the number of days when the education welfare officer (EWO) works solely for the school from one to three. It is too early to see the impact of this increased time.

Students say they continue to feel safe in the school. They added that they appreciate the information, advice and guidance they receive in order to make good choices about their future education, employment and training.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and the management committee are tackling many of the weaknesses in the school and the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in November 2013 and at the previous monitoring inspection. All of the staff who responded to the staff questionnaire agreed that they are clear about what the school is trying to achieve and most of the respondents agreed that the school is led and managed well. However, 50% of the staff said that school policies, for example the behaviour policy, are not consistently applied.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, school leaders have introduced whole-school policies for teaching and learning, teachers' marking and developing students' literacy skills. While many of the actions contained in the policies are appropriate, the policies do not state how, when or by whom the policies will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed, or to whom the findings will be communicated.

Procedures for monitoring students' attendance and attainment have improved significantly. However, the resulting information is not routinely and rigorously analysed to identify underachieving students or attendance patterns and issues. As a consequence, school leaders do not always quickly intervene to support students not making the progress expected of them and do not know the main reasons for students' absence.

The members of the management committee have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They have suitable skills and knowledge to strategically support, guide and challenge the school's leaders. For example, the Chair of the Management Committee has rightly identified the need to better track students' progress. Statutory safeguarding and child protection requirements are met. However, leaders and the management committee are not clear about whether Kickstart's or Telford College of Arts and Technology's safeguarding and child protection policy has been agreed and adopted as the school's policy.

External support

The local authority provides effective support for teachers and leaders through financial services support, a learning and teaching adviser and a representative of the local authority sitting on the school's management committee. As a result, teaching has improved and the management committee has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The local authority has also commissioned additional support from an educational welfare officer. However, the school and local authority have not ensured that the information they receive from excluding schools is always sufficient in order to plan appropriate help and support for individual students, especially those who are most vulnerable.